

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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GRIZZLY BEAR PROPOSED AS "THREATENED SPECIES"

The grizzly bear has been proposed for listing as a "threatened species" in the lower 48 United States by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The public is invited to comment on this proposal. All comments should be addressed to the Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240. Comments received through March 3, 1975, will be considered.

Currently the grizzly bear is not officially considered either "endangered" or "threatened"--the two categories provided for under the Endangered Species Act of 1973. It is under the jurisdiction of the States where it resides and receives no Federal protection except where it resides on Federal lands.

The proposed rulemaking published recently in the Federal Register applies to three ecosystems--the Selway-Bitterroot, the Yellowstone, the Bob Marshall--and to the rest of the lower 48 States.

The rulemaking would permit grizzlies to be killed in the Selway-Bitterroot area only when they pose a serious threat to humans. In the Yellowstone ecosystem and in other areas of the lower 48 States where they may occur, grizzlies could be taken when they pose a serious threat to humans or when necessary to prevent significant depredations on lawfully present livestock. In the Bob Marshall ecosystem, where grizzly bears are most numerous, the total number of bears that may be taken annually would be strictly controlled by the State.

By 1950 in the lower 48 States the grizzly bear could be found only in three areas in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho.

The most critical factor in the grizzly's decline was direct conflict with man. The grizzly, large and obvious, was prone to attack domestic livestock. Unlike the wolf and cougar the grizzly did not always flee when confronted by man.

The grizzly requires large tracts of undisturbed wilderness, more than any other North American mammal. The continued shrinkage of these areas and the increasing penetration into the grizzly's range by man form the basis of the animal's current difficulties in the lower 48 States.

Today the range of the grizzly bear has been reduced to the point where virtually all occur in only three relatively small and isolated ecosystems in Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho. These ecosystems are:

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1. The Selway-Bitterroot Ecosystem, mostly in Idaho with some spill-over into Montana, contains some 1.5 million acres and is extremely wild and inaccessible. There are no reliable population estimates for bears there. The bear is protected from hunting in the Idaho portion of this ecosystem and large tracts of its habitat remain inaccessible and intact. Because of these factors an "endangered" classification was not considered appropriate for the bear in this ecosystem, but its estimated low numbers, low reproductive potential and vulnerability to environmental change prompted a "threatened" classification.

2. The Yellowstone System overlaps the borders of Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho and contains about 5 million acres of mountain forests and meadows, most of which are included in Yellowstone National Park and five National Forests. The grizzly population is scattered throughout the area but concentrates in Yellowstone National Park. There is little opportunity for the isolated population to expand numerically or genetically because the ecosystem is surrounded by grazing lands or marginal habitat. There is no question that the grizzlies of Yellowstone are under several man-made pressures that threaten to limit or disrupt, if not to seriously reduce, the population. For these reasons the grizzly is considered "threatened" in this ecosystem. By listing the grizzly as "threatened" in this ecosystem there could be provision for limited sport hunting once it can be demonstrated that the bear population could sustain such hunting. For the present, however, the proposal would require closed hunting seasons for the ecosystem. (Hunting of any kind within the National Park is forbidden by Federal law.)

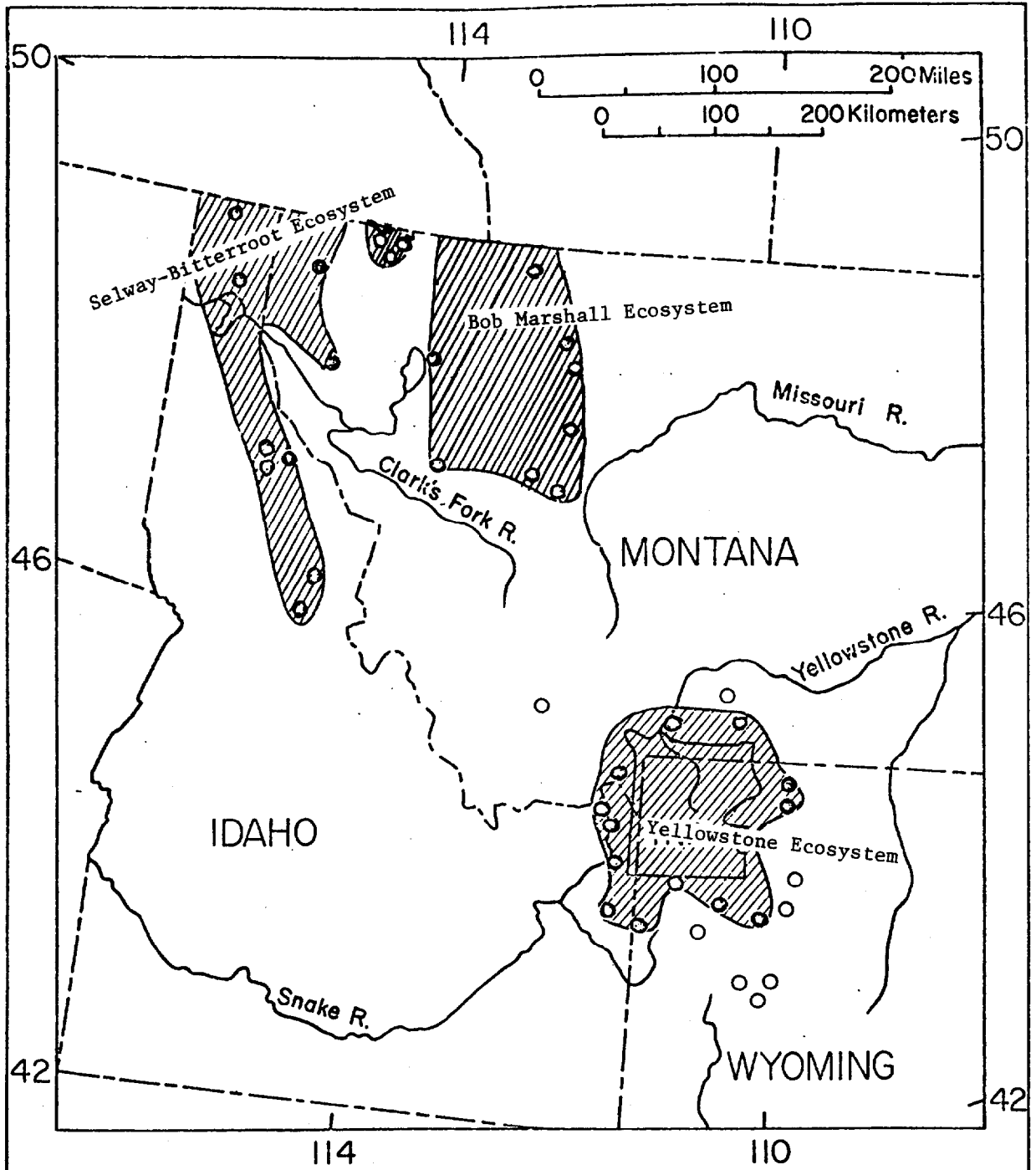
3. The Bob Marshall Ecosystem, confined to the State of Montana, contains some 3.5 million acres composed of Flathead National Forest, the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area, the Mission Mountains Primitive Area, and Glacier National Park. The ecosystem continues north into Canada and is generally thought to contain the largest population of grizzly bears south of Alaska. Hunting has been authorized by the State of Montana in this ecosystem. An unlimited number of bear hunting licenses--averaging about 850 a year in recent years--have been sold to resident and non-resident hunters. Starting next year the State will restrict the total number of grizzly bears taken by all means, to 25 animals annually which is about five bears less than have been killed annually for the past seven years. Unlike the other two ecosystems, the bears in this ecosystem are not isolated. They join with bear populations to the north in Canada which extend on through the Rockies to Alaska. All of these factors were considered in the proposed "threatened" status for the grizzly in this ecosystem.

All indications are that grizzly bears outside of these three ecosystems are extremely rare and since they are subject to legal and illegal hunting pressures they, too, are proposed for designation as "threatened" and could be killed legally, only when they pose a serious threat to humans.

This action is being assessed with regard to its effect on the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

The publication of this proposed rulemaking comes after a complete review of the grizzly bear's status which was initiated in March 1974.

KNOWN RANGES OF GRIZZLY BEARS



The solid dots on the map represent locale of actual specimen discovery or reliable sighting. The open circles represent locale of sightings of grizzly bears beyond their normal range. The hatched lined areas represent the normal ranges of grizzly bears. (Data from National Academy of Sciences Grizzly Study.)